

**NARRATOR: Baker, Robert "Spike"**

**INTERVIEWER: Troy Reeves**

**DATE: May 16, 2000**

**LOCATION: near Emmett, Idaho (at Baker's house)**

**PROJECT: Smokejumpers/Forest Fire Fighters**

**Tape**

**Counter**

**Summary**

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- 000 Introduction.
- 005 Baker talked about his early years. He grew up and lived near or in Boise most of his life. He was raised mainly by his grandparents and two uncles. He fought fires before he turned eighteen.
- 030 Baker then discussed his beginnings with the Forest Service, giving an overview of his jobs during his Forest Service career. Baker trained seasonal employees in the summer on how to properly fight fires in the forest. Baker retired in 1983; he could retire early because the Forest Service has an early retirement program for people in a hazardous job. Baker worked as a seasonal employee after his official retirement.
- 090 Baker's first fire was in 1948 near Arrowrock Dam. He talked about how rangers found fire fighters during the 1940s and 1950s; it was different than how crews fight fire today. As a temporary employee he was paid an hourly wage plus "room and board." Baker recalled the difference in training fire fighters in the 1940s and 1950s from his later years with the Forest Service.
- 140 There were many project fires in 1949, and most of those fires were on the Payette National Forest. Baker talked about why there were so many fires in 1949 and what fires he fought in the summer of 1949.
- 215 Baker told a story about how a fire fighter hurt himself during the Hunts Gulch fire in 1949. He talked about how he and others packed this person out from the fire.
- 240 After Baker graduated high school in 1950, he worked for construction companies during the non-fire seasons. Baker knew the man who hired the seasonal crews, so that man hired Baker first when the fires began. Baker talked about how he helped ship and pack goods and material for fire fighters during the summer.
- 300 Baker was chosen as a dispatcher at an early age (twenty three), which was unusual because most dispatchers in the 1950s were older people.

- 335 Baker worked with Kay (?) D. Flock, who was known as the father of Smokey Bear. Baker told the story of how the Smokey Bear program was established in the Forest Service, including the story of the baby bear that became the first Smokey Bear.
- 400 The fire warehouse where Baker worked was located at 316 E. Myrtle in Boise. Baker told the stories about why he worked at the warehouse and where he worked (other locations) during his time for the Boise National Forest. He also recalled the beginning of the National Interagency Fire Center in Boise in the middle of the 1960s. Baker worked at the fire center for several years.
- 475 **END OF SIDE ONE**  
**TAPE ONE SIDE TWO**
- 008 Baker moved from the fire center to a different building near the center where he worked until his retirement. Baker discussed his work in trying to create multi-agency fire groups.
- 040 Baker talked about his concerns about being a young dispatcher. The smokejumper base leader at Idaho City, Idaho, helped Baker with initial attacks on fire. Baker mentioned some old-time smokejumpers, including "Smoky" Stover and Wayne Webb.
- 080 There were many changes during Baker's career. He talked about helicopters and how it changed the profession. He also told a story about a former pack stringer. Other changes in the profession included smokejumping and hiring a full-time pilot for the Forest Service. Baker also talked about the different airplanes that flew on the Boise National Forest.
- 185 According to Baker, another change in fire fighting was dropping retardant on a fire. Baker talked about how retardant and what retardant was initially dropped on the Boise National Forest. The first year, which was in the late 1950s, they dropped retardant on 18 fires for \$3,000. Baker thought you could not drop one load today for \$3,000.
- 325 Baker worked primarily as a dispatcher. He described what a dispatcher did during the fire season and also how the national forest personnel, including lookouts, attacked a fire during Baker's career. The dispatcher determined how each fire was tackled. In later years the dispatch coordinated with regional and national fire centers to fight large project fires in the forest.
- 465 Hours worked in the summer varied. In the early years, Baker could work 12, 14, or 16 hours a day. Later, they tried to work in twelve-hour shifts.

490           **END OF SIDE TWO**  
              **TAPE TWO SIDE ONE**

000           Introduction.

005           Baker discussed what jobs he did during the non-fire season. Baker worked on regional and national fire issues.

020           On July 2, 1967, the *Idaho Statesman* published an article about fire training that featured Baker among other people. He talked about training seasonal employees to fight fire. Baker trained employees to fight fire practically his whole career.

060           Baker stayed in the Boise National Forest throughout his career. He was one of the few employees who did that. When he retired, between he and his predecessor served as dispatchers for over 60 of the 75 years of the Boise National Forest's existence.

085           In the 1990s, according to Baker, there were many large fires. He also mentioned some large fires during his time as a dispatcher for the national forest. Baker talked about fires burning already in the country during the spring of 2000.

140           The build up of fuels, according to Baker, has led to many large fires in the last decade. He also mentioned the Forest Service's "10 a.m. Policy" and how this past policy has created some large fires. Another reason, according to Baker, was logging policies and practices.

225           Baker gave his opinions on recent decisions concerning road building and maintenance on the national forests and public lands. He also talked about the treasure of public land in Idaho and other western states and how certain people want to change that status.

310           Baker's nickname is "Spike." He told a story about how he thought he got the nickname; he did not know for sure how he got the name.

325           Baker's training was not in college; it was on the job. He felt he had no problems with people who had degrees in forestry.

340           Baker's friends are both inside and outside the Forest Service. He talked about his friendships.

385           **END OF SIDE ONE**  
              **END OF INTERVIEW**

## NAMES AND PLACES INDEX

Alamogordo, New Mexico  
Aldape, John  
Anderson Ranch Dam  
Arrowrock Dam fire  
Barker, Elliot  
Bear Valley (Idaho)  
Boise Interagency Fire Center  
Boise National Forest  
Boise, Idaho  
Bradley Field (Boise, Idaho)  
Browns' Tie and Lumber Company  
Bureau of Land Management  
C.J. Strike Dam  
Circle N Creek (1949 fire)  
Enloe, Charlie  
Filler, Bud  
*Fire Control Notes*  
Flock, K.D. (father of Smokey the Bear)  
Grandview, Idaho  
Great Basin Fire Center  
Greer, O.V.A.  
Hartnett, Clare  
Hells Canyon (1949 fire)  
Hunt & Willett Company (?)  
Hunts Gulch (1949 fire)  
Idaho City, Idaho  
*Idaho Statesman* (Boise, Idaho newspaper)  
Knight, Lynn  
Laferty, George  
Lincoln National Forest (New Mexico)  
Lowman, Idaho fire  
Lucky Peak Dam  
M.R. Priest & Sons  
Main Quick Freeze (Boise, Idaho)  
Mayfield, Idaho  
McCall, Idaho  
Morrison-Knudsen Company  
National Interagency Fire Center  
Palmer, "Slim"  
Payette National Forest  
Payette River  
Piper, Bill (Piper Aircraft)  
Salmon River  
Sante Fe, New Mexico

**NAMES AND PLACES INDEX** (*continued*)

Secesh River (Idaho)

Smith, Ken

Smokey the Bear

St. Orr [?], Robert

Stover, "Smoky"

Thorn Creek (Idaho)

Trinity Lakes (Idaho)

*Two-Man Stick: Memoirs of a Smokejumper* (book by Bud Filler about smokejumping)

United States Forest Service

Warren, Idaho

Webb, Wayne